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In this issue

Non-penetrating chest blows and sudden death in the young

Sudden death after a blow to the chest is most commonly reported in the American literature. Two cases are reported (p 421) which draw attention to a lethal condition of which many practitioners are unaware. Both cases show differences from commotio cordis and illustrate features on autopsy. The severity of impact required to cause death after a blow to the chest is often unremarkable and collapse may not be instantaneous. It is important that clinicians are aware of this mode of death and that appropriate inquiry is made when collapse follows a blow to the chest.

A knowledge of the laws of violence is a useful adjunct to the clinical practice of accident and emergency medicine

Working in an accident and emergency department inevitably involves dealing with the consequences of violence. The decision whether or not to charge the suspect, and with what specific offence, sometimes appears illogical. John Bache (p 396) describes the legal processes involved in this decision, differentiates the various offences (particularly common assault, actual bodily harm, and grievous bodily harm), and guides us through the complexities of the criminal justice system. Reading this paper should increase your knowledge of a system in which accident and emergency staff are intimately—though often unwittingly—involved.